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COLCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Special Meeting

Monday, November 25, 2024
5:00 PM
William J Johnston Middle School

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT : Vice-Chair Christopher Rivers, Secretary Margo Gignac, Donna Antonacci, Michelle Millington and Stefanie Tracey-Calash.

ADMINISTRATION PRESENT : Superintendent Daniel P. Sullivan, III, Assistant Superintendent Jessica L. Kuckel, Director of Pupil Services Eve Hurley, Assistant Director of Pupil Services Rebecca Tedesco, Bacon Academy (BA) Principal Amy Begué, BA Assistant Principal Melissa Cyr, BA Assistant Principal Michael Mal, Jack Jackter Intermediate School (JJIS) Principal Elise Butson, Colchester Elementary School (CES) Principal Judy O'Meara.

OTHERS PRESENT : Director of Finance and Operations Rachel Linkkila, Instructional Technology Coordinator Barbara Johnson, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent Alyssa Fratoni, Director of Educational Operations Andrew Barillari, Athletic Director Kevin Burke, Human Resources Coordinator Pauline Goetz, BA School Counselor Ashley Zaugg.

1. **MEETING OPENING**
   1.1. Call to Order
   Vice-Chair Rivers called the meeting to order at 5:06 PM

   1.2 Roll Call
   Vice-Chair Rivers conducted a roll call of the Board.
   Vice-Chair Rivers, Secretary Gignac and D. Antonacci present in person.
   S. Tracey-Calash present via Zoom.

   1.3 Pledge of Allegiance

2. ***PRIORITY DISCUSSION / ACTION ITEMS**
   2.1. *Discussion and Possible Action on Bacon Academy "School within a School" Magnet School Proposal (including opportunity for questions and feedback from the Public)

Superintendent Sullivan began by going over the format for the remainder of the meeting. He stated that the Administration will begin with a presentation with relevant facts. After the presentation, the Board of Education (BOE) will have the opportunity to ask questions. Then, the floor will open to the public in the room for questions, then to zoom questions and finally back to BOE for final questions and discussion and possible action.

Superintendent Sullivan stated that about 21 months ago, the BOE was asked by the Board of

Finance (BOF) Chair what we could do to increase enrollment and the revenue stream relative to education at BA. The Superintendent and then Assistant Superintendent Hewes discussed the possibility of a magnet program at BA. The application for the magnet school was submitted and within the last ten days, we received the approval from the State with very tight, quick timelines. Superintendent Sullivan invited BA Principal Begué to speak about the work over the last few years to get to where we are today.

M. Millington arrived in person at 5:10 PM.

Principal Begué began the presentation by stating that BA is to exist as it already is, a magnet program would just be added. Every Magnet School student will be a BA student, but not every BA student will be a Magnet School student. She stated that the Magnet School would take their core classes inside the existing BA school building. Principal Begué went over the proposed courses of study: Public Safety, Fire, Firefighter, EMT, Sports Medicine, CNA, Medical, Criminal Justice, Forensics, National Security, and the potential for JROTC. These are all in-demand careers that are facing shortages currently.

Ashley Zaugg, a School Counselor at BA and Co-Chair of the Magnet School Working Group, continued the presentation by discussing the proposed progression of classes for the new magnet program. She explained that the 9th grade would be an exploratory year, allowing students to explore various fields and discover what they enjoy, helping them decide what they might want to pursue in their high school career. The 10th grade would be considered an overlapping year with the 9th grade but would have more specific focuses tailored to each field of study. Zaugg pointed out that the "TBD" classes listed on the schedule indicate a partnership with the University of New Haven (UNH), though the details are still being finalized.

Zaugg also provided important information on the program's funding, emphasizing that it represents a great financial opportunity. The program would be funded through the Per Pupil Expenditure for Out of District students, excluding transportation and special education costs. These additional costs would be covered by the student's sending district. She also highlighted state grant opportunities, including a $75,000 grant to help cover startup costs and a state program that would cover at least 95% of the building costs for the new magnet school. The new school building will be a 5,250 square-foot metal and glass structure, which will replace the current portable classroom. The demolition of the portable is also included in the state grant.

Zaugg also went over the map that was included in the presentation of surrounding towns. The yellow towns (Hartford, East Hartford, Manchester, Wethersfield, Glastonbury, Middletown, Portland, East Hampton, Marlborough and Hebron) represent towns that already have established transportation and would be at no cost. The orange towns (Haddam, East Haddam, Salen, East Lyme, Waterford, Montville, Bozrah, Norwich, Columbia, Lebanon and Franklin) represent the towns that we are hoping to extend the option to but they would have to provide their own transportation. We do already have agreements with some of the "orange" towns, like Bozrah, but we are hoping to build on that. She stated that Grant money would offset transportation costs.

Principal Begué discussed the partnership with the University of New Haven (UNH), highlighting a meeting in August with Superintendent Sullivan, Assistant Superintendent Kuckel, and herself to explore dual enrollment opportunities. She emphasized the cutting-edge and well-respected work coming out of UNH, with plans for BA to collaborate with UNH on curriculum development, field trips, and guest speakers. The proposed timeline, if approved, is very accelerated. From November to February, key tasks will include hiring a Magnet Development Coordinator,

creating a website, completing the RSCO application (due December 3rd), finalizing the grant application, planning facilities, and focusing on marketing and recruitment for grades 9 and 10. In the Spring, work will begin on the curriculum, staff hiring, and preparing for student orientation in August.

Enrollment plans include 80 students across grades 9 and 10, with the goal of adding an additional 40 students each year. Up to 25% of the students may be from Colchester. All magnet students will have access to extracurricular activities, including clubs, sports, and other school activities. The program offers significant benefits, including additional enrollment, expanded programming and pathways, dual enrollment for college credits, college partnerships, athletics, a new campus, and career shadowing opportunities. Proposed names for the new school include the Public Service Academy of Eastern CT, Heroes Academy of Eastern CT, and Hayward School for Law and Public Safety, for consideration by the Board.

At this time, the presentation is complete and is moving on to questions from the Board.

M. Millington asked if the salaries for the new staff associated with the magnet programs were included in the grant funding. Principal Begué answered that that was correct.

S. Tracey-Calash, via Zoom, asked about the pathways and what had fallen off and why. Principal Begué answered that with the partnership with UNH, there were so many more opportunities related to Public Safety and their programs that it was decided to add those in. BA already has a strong early-childhood program and that pathway can be built on our own with existing staff and programming and that is why it was tabled in terms of the magnet program.

M. Gignac asked if they could expand on the Public Safety and ROTC aspect of the programming. Zaugg answered stating that they are working on recruiting a ROTC partner but it is not easy. She stated that it is best to start with 4 strong pathways and do them well and then think about adding more.

S. Tracey-Calash, via Zoom, asked if there was someone in mind for the Program Coordinator position. Principal Begué stated yes. Superintendent Sullivan stated that with the magnet development grant, the initial appointment of the position would be for the remainder of the school year and the position would be in-house for that time.

S. Tracey-Calash, via Zoom, clarified that the first wave of students would be entering in the Fall of 2025 and asked about the enrollment potential. Principal Begué stated that they are looking at up to 80 students across grades 9 and 10, adding 40 students each year thereafter. Superintendent Sullivan stated that these are agreed on targets and that we want to be realistic.

S. Tracey-Calash, via Zoom, asked for clarification about the potential 5% associated building cost. Superintendent Sullivan stated that the State has two different fundings, either 95% or 100% reimbursed.

D. Antonacci asked about funding for the program in regards to promoting and recruiting and what the financial responsibilities of Colchester would be or if it is funded by the magnet program. Principal Begué stated that RSCO does the majority of the work for us. We need to provide the promotional materials for them so it can be a part of all the other choice programs in the area. Zaugg stated that the Coordinator will be doing a lot of face-to-face time going to Fairs and School, being hands-on with getting people interested and informed.

D. Antonacci asked what part of our current students are interested in the magnet program. Zaugg stated that right now, it is being well received by word of mouth. There is excitement but it is hard to speak on "what if's"

D. Antonacci asked what the tuition costs would be. Superintendent Sullivan stated that the state has a funding formula that they use to come up with the tuition cost that is dependent on the town that the student will be coming from. He stated that a safe estimate would be around $13,500 per student, but it again depends on the town the student is coming from. He also stated that we will only be receiving tuition payments from non-Colchester residents. No more than 25% of the students in the Magnet program can be from Colchester.

C. Rivers stated that in regards to tuition, the number of $13,500 seems low. He asked if that number includes transportation or Special Education coverages and if it will change year to year. Zaugg stated that the tuition would be covered by the students sending district. Superintendent Sullivan stated that the tuition costs will change year to year and it will offset the cost of needed new teachers.

C. Rivers asked that if we get both State grants, the Magnet Program would be 100% funded. He also asked what we would need to have 80 kids come in in the Fall of 2025. Principal Begué stated that the specialized building is not needed right away as we are only going to be starting with grades 9 and 10. BA can house the classes in its current building if construction delays happen.

C. Rivers asked if BA students not in the magnet program can take one-off courses. Superintendent Sullivan stated that if there are open seats and the courses are dual listed, it can be filled by a BA student.

C. Rivers asked about tuition and what that money would go to. Superintendent Sullivan stated that the funds would go to the magnet school staff and the remainder of the funds would offset the salaries of teachers educating Colchester students.

M. Millington asked if current BA freshmen can apply as magnet students and if it would put them behind since they would be starting in year 10. Zaugg answered stating that it can be done with the work of a counselor and the Coordinator to map the courses into a graduation plan, with the potential of doubling up. She stated that it is not so many credits that it cannot be done.

D. Antonacci asked if students can start after year 10. Zaugg answered that there would not be enough time/room in the schedule to complete the requirements since the 11th and 12th years are so specialized.

D. Antonacci asked what the students will receive at graduation. Zaugg listed the different options based on the course of study chosen by the student, such as Firefighting 1, EMT, CNA, Physical Therapy, UNH college credits, partnerships/internships with Colchester Fire Department (CFD), Troop K and Colchester Police Department (CPD).

Student Board Member Abigail Stillwell asked if more than 25% of Colchester applies, how are they chosen. Zaugg answered that it is a lottery system and we have no control.

M. Gignac asked if part of the Possible Action tonight needs to be naming the school. Superintendent Sullivan stated that a name for the Magnet School would need to be decided on tonight.

D. Antonacci asked what the program of study was based on. Superintendent Sullivan stated that they looked at what was already existing nearby and the Governor's Workforce Initiatives. Fire Chief Hoffman spoke to the Administration about Fire/EMT programs at BA because involvement has been down. That led to a conversation with the previous SRO about police applications being down. He stated that we are not in competition with any local magnet school and the program of studies are jobs that are in demand.

At this time, questions from the Board are complete and are moving on to questions from the Public in the room.

Samantha Van-Zilen, Brindlewood Path, asked what happens if there are not enough applications from Out of District students and if it is realistic to recruit enough staff and would BA need additional staff. Superintendent Sullivan answered that the worst case scenario is building for low to no cost to replace the portables. He also stated that this is not a stand alone magnet program and that students can participate in BA activities. He stated that he is confident about the staffing because of the partnership with UNH and how the state is flexible about credentials for specialized areas. Van Zilen also asked if the Magnet School students will increase the sizes of the core classes. Superintendent Sullivan answered that we might have fuller enrollment, but we will not be increasing our maximums. He stated the more students we have, the more funding we will receive. Van Zilen also asked if a magnet student were to get to 11th or 12th grade and decide to exit the program, where would they go and what graduation would look like. Superintendent Sullivan stated that they would go back to their home school and that graduation would be with BA.

Judy O'Meara, Middletown Road, read a letter from Colchester Public Schools Medical Advisor Alexis Cordiano in favor of the program.

Michael Dubreuil, Woodbine Road, asked about the timeline about changing the property at BA and when looking at UNH, was it considered to go to a local school like UCONN for lower tuition costs. Superintendent Sullivan stated that UNH is one of the only schools to specialize in this field which gives students access to strong curriculum and strong instructors. Zaugg stated that credits are transferable to other colleges. Dubreuil also asked how the taxpayers will not be covering the excess cost. Superintendent Sullivan stated that we will still be bringing in revenue to offset the operational costs.

Tracey Bruni, David Drive, asked about recruiting outside of Colchester and how to keep the 25% BA students. She also asked what other hands-on experience is given to the students besides the CFD partnership. Superintendent Sullivan stated that next week, a meeting with the Captain of the CT State Police to speak about an internship program. He stated that there would also be other fire department internships, and CNA students would have hands-on time in long term facilities. Principal Begué spoke on keeping Colchester students stating that they are adding something new, not going elsewhere. Superintendent Sullivan also stated that more students equals more electives.

John Consiglio, Diane Lane, asked about startup costs. C. Rivers answered that the first place is out of reserves, the second is going through referendum. He stated that even if we get 100% grant funding, we would still need a Building Committee and to go through the Board of Selectman (BOS). Consiglio asked what is the cap of students allowed and if the 25% Colchester students is a given. Principal Begué answered that 160 students total at a time because students will graduate out of the program. She also stated that Colchester students would make up 25% of the demands. Consiglio also asked how you will know you are getting

capable students with the lottery program. Zaugg answered stating that we cannot guarantee the highest achieving students but we work with the kids we have and support and build them in the best way we can. Superintendent Sullivan stated that the State will not pay for the students to attend the magnet program if they are failing. They will be sent back to their home school like other magnet programs. Consiglio asked why this is good for Colchester and what are the gains going to be allocated for. Superintendent Sullivan stated that the goal is to offset costs for existing staff by expanding program opportunities.

Brian Martin, Heatherwood Drive, spoke about the positive impact the magnet program will have on athletics, clubs and activities. He is also excited that motivated students will be brought into BA as it will be a great example for other BA students. He believes that this will be a positive impact at BA and beneficial to the community.

First Selectman Bernie Dennler loves the idea of keeping with the traditions and history of Colchester by going on the Public Service track. Dennler asked for clarification that the Per Pupil Expenditure includes the cost of special education and transportation. Superintendent Sullivan stated that the tuition is paid for by the state. If a magnet student has special education costs, those costs would be covered by their sending district. Dennler asked what happens if this is not approved tonight. Superintendent Sullivan stated that we would lose the opportunity as Colchester was one of two schools selected by the state. He stated that whatever we do tonight is a final decision. Dennler asked what happens to the building if it is approved and the 5% funding isn't received. Superintendent Sullivan stated that it is a three year pilot and if it is not supported, it is three years and done.

Lea Poresky, Settlers Lane, stated that she felt surprised by this as some people were just finding out about this a few days ago and that more notice would have been appreciated. She asked about the minimum number of Colchester students in the lottery and how that works. Superintendent Sullivan said that this work started being talked about in September 2023 regarding a working group and it was referenced in the September 2023 Newsletter. It was also talked about in November and December of 2023 and updates were talked about in January 2024.He also stated that there will be two different lotteries for Colchester students and Out of District students. Poresky asked what the current graduation size is now and why we are worried about small class sizes. Principal Begué stated that there are around 600 students at BA currently and when she started 9 years ago, there were over 800. She stated that the ideal class size is 18-22 students and that increased enrollment is not a bad thing. Poresky asked about spreading teachers and administration thinner than they already are and Principal Begué stated that the Assistant Principals will be working with magnet students. Core classes have minimal impact. She stated that more specific courses would need hiring or moving around that meets dual enrollment requirements. Poresky asked if Public Safety recruitments happen currently and Zaugg answered that military and college representatives come in regularly as well as CPD and CFD. Poresky also asked what is being done with the building revenue money. Superintendent Sullivan stated that it would be used to offset current operating costs and should help control internal costs while paying for new staff.

Mike Egan, BOF Vice-Chair, Lebanon Avenue, via Zoom, stated that Colchester has been facing declining enrollment for years. We have the capability to fill BA and it is something that benefits everyone. He asked how much it would cost to remove the portables and if it is included in the grant. If it isn't included, what is the repair/removal cost. Superintendent Sullivan stated that it is included in the cost. He said that if the state doesn't do it with the Magnet School, it will fall to the Town.

Matthew Parsons, Taylor Road, via Zoom, showed his support for the Magnet School.

Deanna Bouchard, Meadow Drive, via Zoom, agreed that the general feeling was that it was not known this was happening. She stated that it is hard to digest something being thrown out on the Monday before a holiday. She stated that this is a big undertaking and to not rush it through.

Unnamed, via Zoom, asked for clarification on who provides oversight for this. It was answered that the BOE does.

Adam Reddit, Prospect Road, via Zoom, asked if anyone on the Board had an opposing view to not move forward. C. Rivers stated that to his knowledge, discussion had not been had prior to the meeting and he is unsure of how the vote will go.

IT Coordinator B. Johnson read an email from Katherine Kosiba regarding the cost for transportation. It was answered that the district does not handle transportation, and there would be grants to provide transportation to students for extracurricular activities.

John Consiglio asked what if only a small number of students want to attend a specialist class, what would happen to the teacher who you hired to teach that class? Superintendent Sullivan stated that in the long run, if a pathway isn't strong, a shift will have to be made. He stated that the teacher would most likely not be a full time teacher and this would not be their primary source of income.

Michael Dubreuil asked, with the Magnet students, if we would become eligible to have the state pay for other repairs at BA such as the roof. Superintendent Sullivan stated that it is dependent on how many students you have in the school and that there are different grants available.

Karen Belding, BOF member, Deer Run, asked what the cost would be and what stipulations are on reimbursement. Superintendent Sullivan stated that the cost would be what we put into it and that stipulations do not have anything to do with the success of the program.

First Selectman Dennler asked if we had a rough idea on what cash we have on hand and if the building gets hung up are we stuck. Superintendent Sullivan stated that the money is not needed upfront and that he thinks the state would pull the plug if we do not have the backing and approval from the Town.

Deanna Bouchard asked if there was any racial criteria for admission and C. Rivers stated that it is a blind lottery.

Dorothy, Skyview Drive, knew that this was being discussed but was surprised that a decision was being made tonight. She asked why it was rushed and why citizens' input was not taken into consideration prior to this meeting. Superintendent Sullivan stated that the application was submitted last January. In the Spring and Summer, we spoke with the state. For the longest time we were just told it was with OPM. Within the last 10 days, we received a Congratulations and Next Steps letter and that is why we have to act quickly. This is closely tied to state funding and the ability to pause or push this down the road does not exist. C. Rivers stressed the December 3rd deadline to get information out to Towns to gauge their level of interest. Zaugg stated that the plan for the magnet school did not want to get out to the greater CT area since the pathways are unique.

C. Rivers clarified that tonight, a decision needs to be made and a name will need to be chosen

if approved.

S. Tracey-Calash clarified that if approved tonight, RSCO would then be able to go to communities and gauge interest.

D. Antonacci asked what the timeline for going to the Town is. Superintendent Sullivan stated that once we know which grant, we will go to the Board of Selectman and they will determine what they do/don't want to do.

M. Millington stated that when looking for a new superintendent in late 2023, declining enrollment was a big part. She stated that an educated community is a successful community and that it seems foolish to turn down a 95% reimbursement.

M. Gignac stated that the Board does not have discussions prior to meetings. She stated that magnet students are motivated and there for a purpose. The opportunity this brings to Colchester is enormous.

D. Antonacci stated that she is all for creating opportunities in education. She stated that silence is not an indication that their minds are made up. She came into this meeting considering this as a win-win. She apologizes for the public not feeling informed. She also feels rushed by the State but it is irresponsible to not make the decision to go forward and hopefully other Boards will make responsible decisions for the community.

S. Tracey-Calash sees it as a value to the community.

Motion by: M. Millington
Motion to approve participating in a three year magnet school pilot as offered by the State of Connecticut.
Second: M. Gignac
Roll Call: All in favor
Vote: Motion carried

Motion by: M. Gignac
Motion to name the approved Magnet School "Hayward Academy for Public Service"
Second: M. Millington
Roll Call: All in favor
Vote: Motion carried

3. **ADJOURNMENT**

Motion by: M. Gignac
Motion to adjourn.
Second: D. Antonacci
Roll Call: All in favor
Vote: Motion carried

Vice-Chair Rivers adjourned the meeting at 7:46 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Alyssa Fratoni, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent